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(12) **United States Patent**
Rajala et al.

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(54) **DISPOSABLE UNDERGARMENT AND RELATED MANUFACTURING EQUIPMENT AND PROCESSES**

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(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 0 days.

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(Under 37 CFR 1.47)

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(51) **Int. Cl.**
A61F 13/15 (2006.01)
A61F 13/20 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
USPC **604/385.27; 604/385.25**

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
USPC 604/358, 367, 385.01, 385.24–385.3,
604/386, 396, 402

See application file for complete search history.

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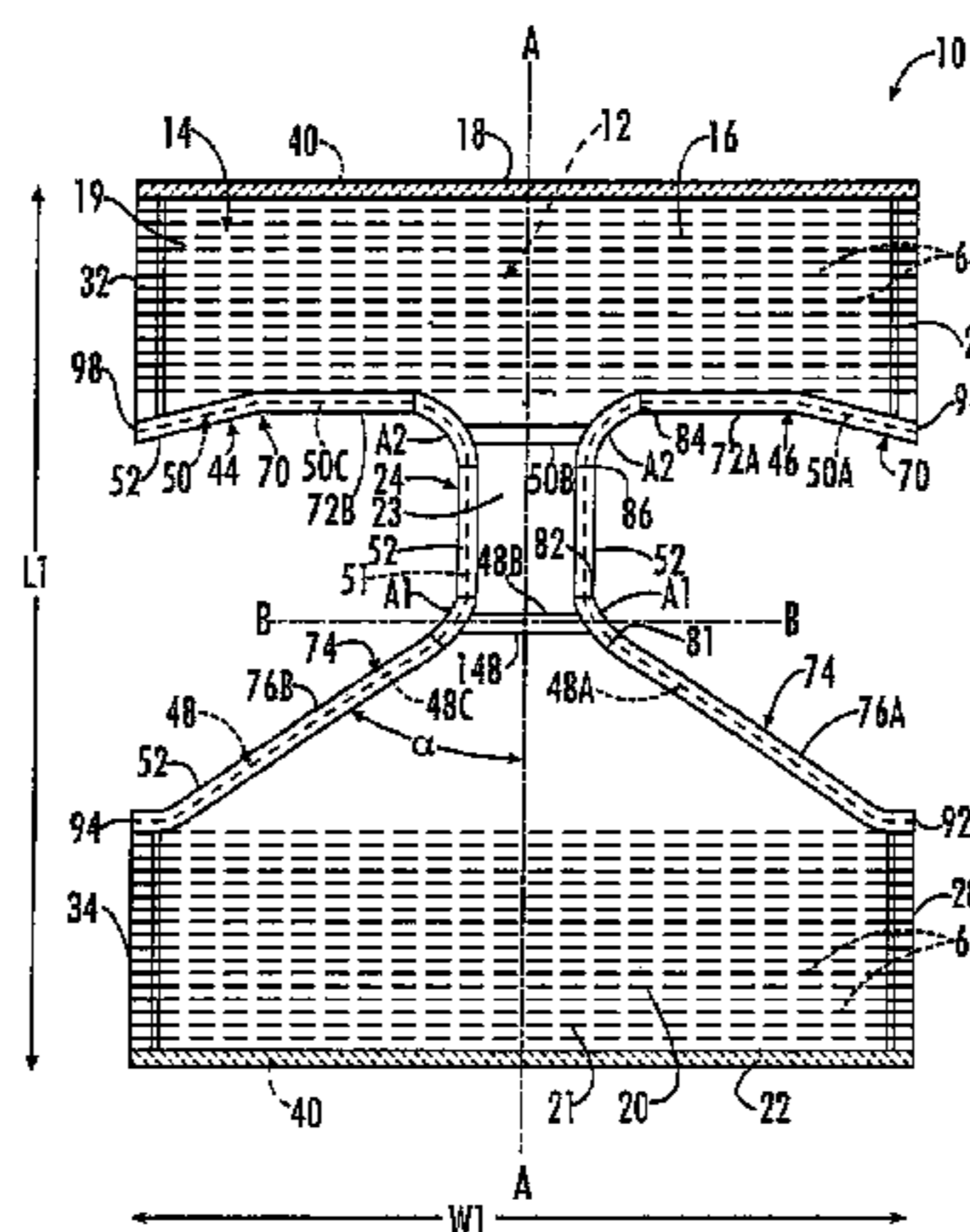
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

This invention pertains to a three dimensional disposable panty, subassemblies of the panty, and an apparatus and methods for making the panty and subassemblies. The panty is designed to hold a primary absorbent sanitary pad. The panty may have elasticized leg and waist openings and be stretchable about the hip and stomach regions of a user. The panty provides backup protection to control egress of fluids that leak or seep around or through the primary sanitary pad. The panty includes a secondary absorbent positioned in the crotch area and extending into the body of the disposable panty, front and back, and preferably over the leg elastics to trap, inside the panty, leakage from the primary absorbent, and to prevent strike through onto e.g. outer clothing and bed linen. The apparatus and methods facilitate assembling leg elastics and crotch elastics into the panty subassemblies while assembling a series of panty subassemblies in a continuous web structure at a constant, or relatively constant, continuous and efficient speed.

16 Claims, 12 Drawing Sheets



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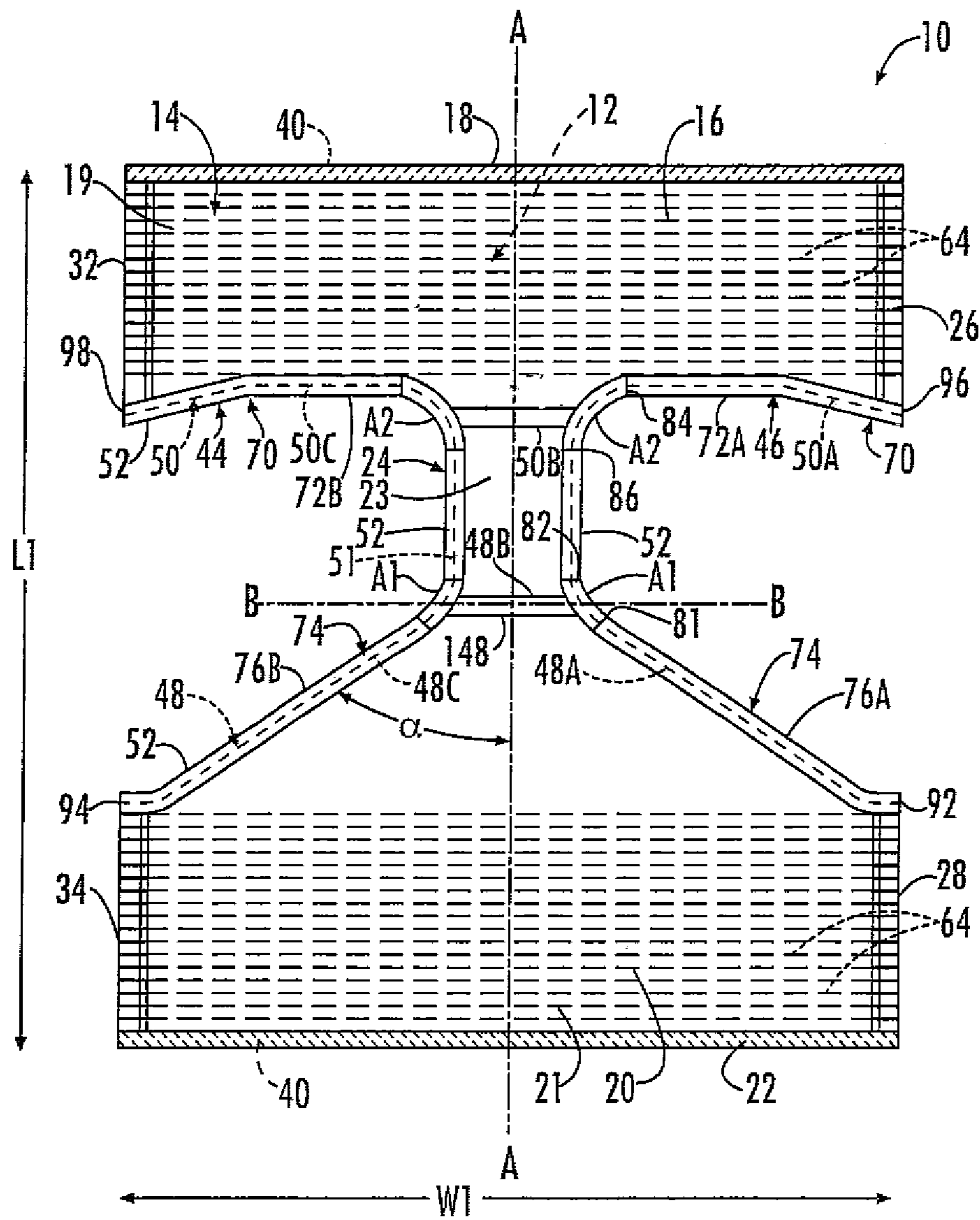


FIG. 1

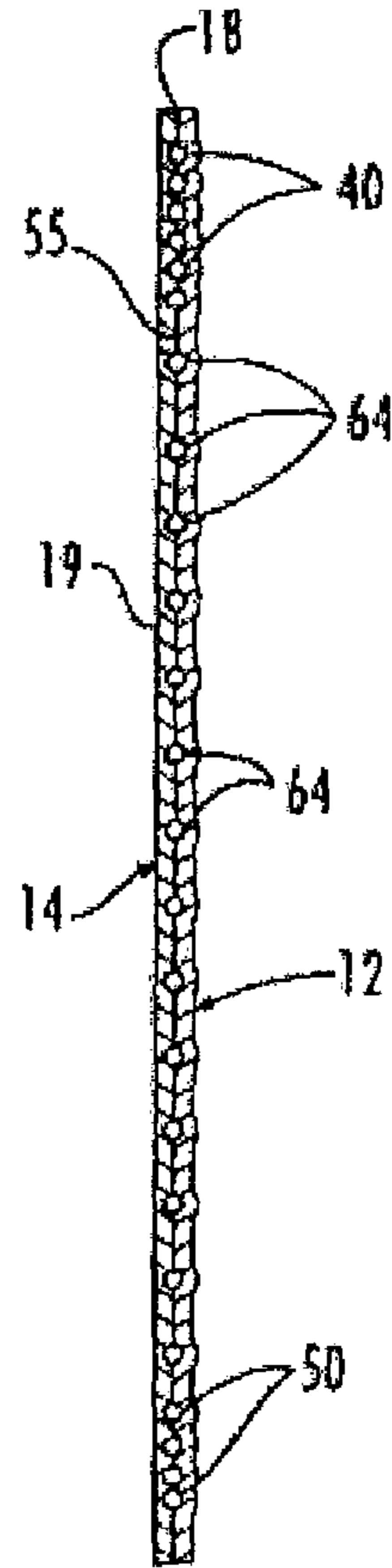


FIG. 3

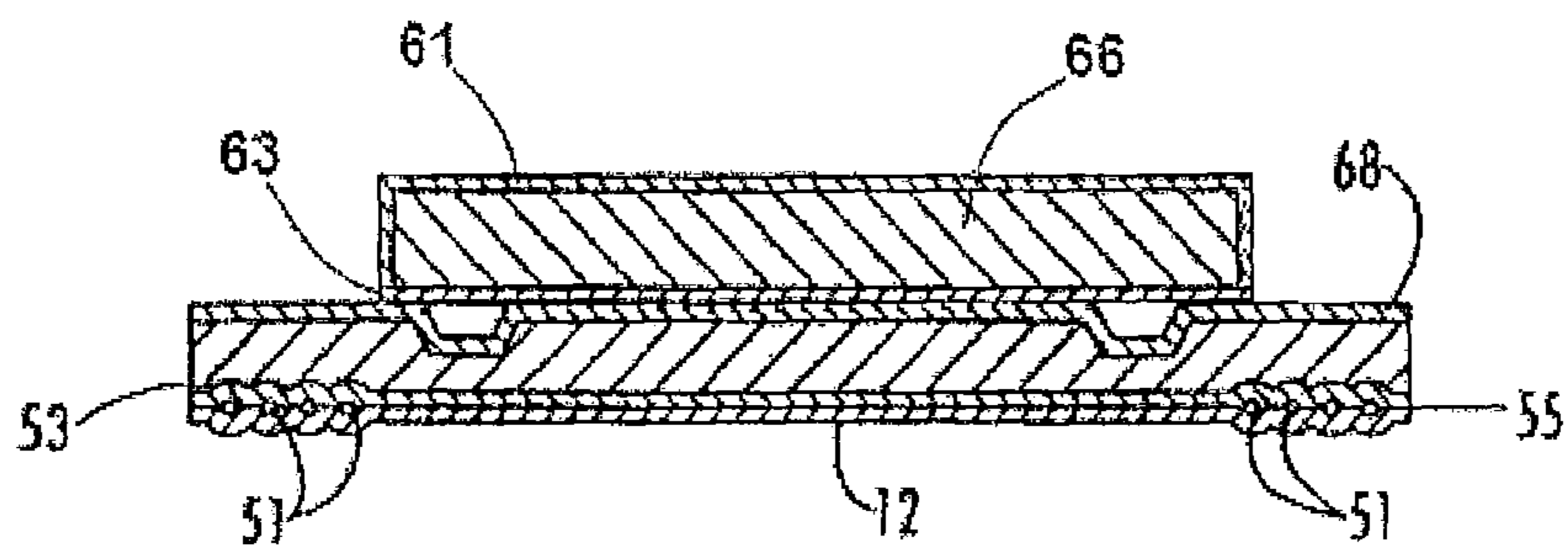


FIG. 4

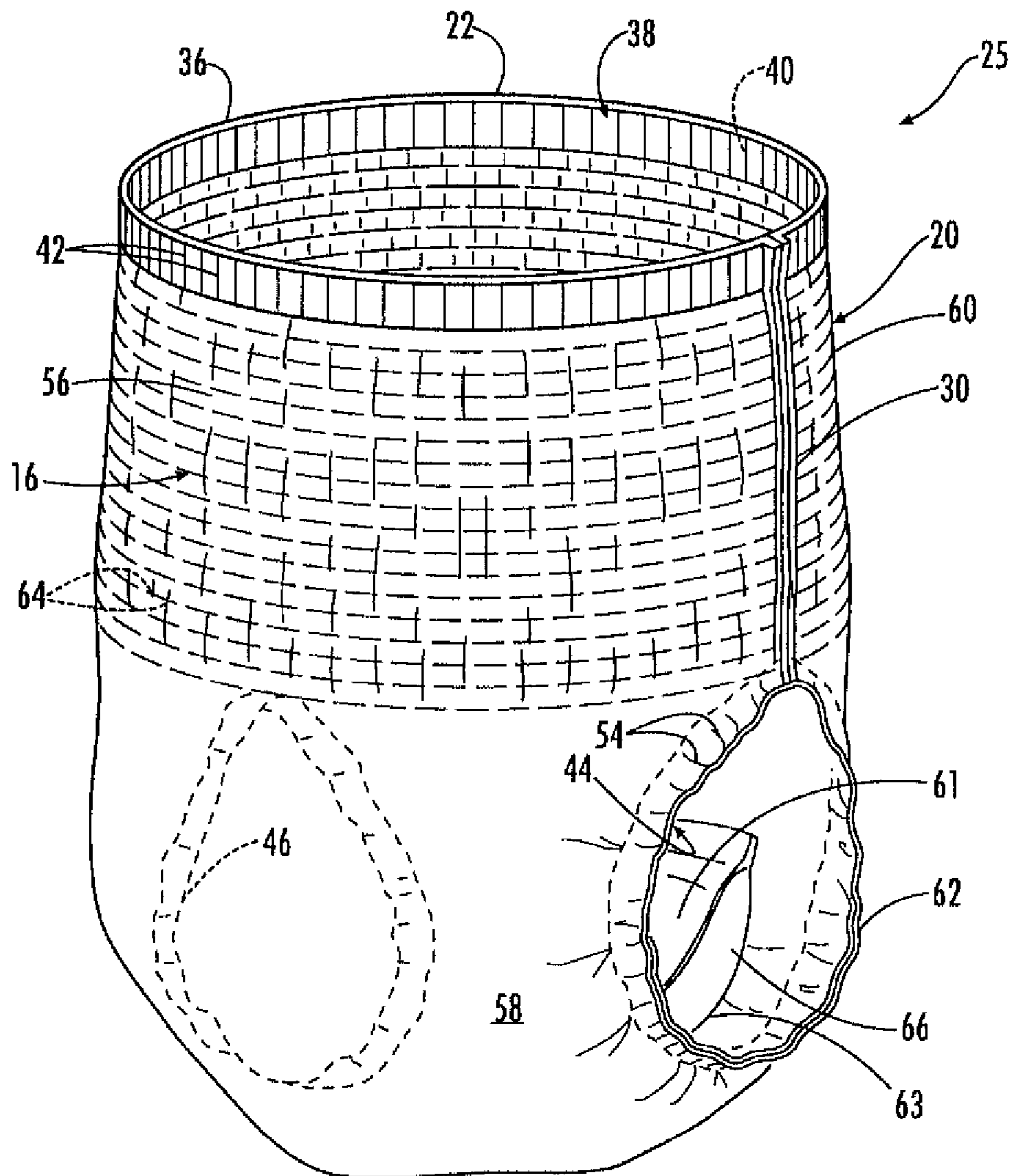


FIG. 5

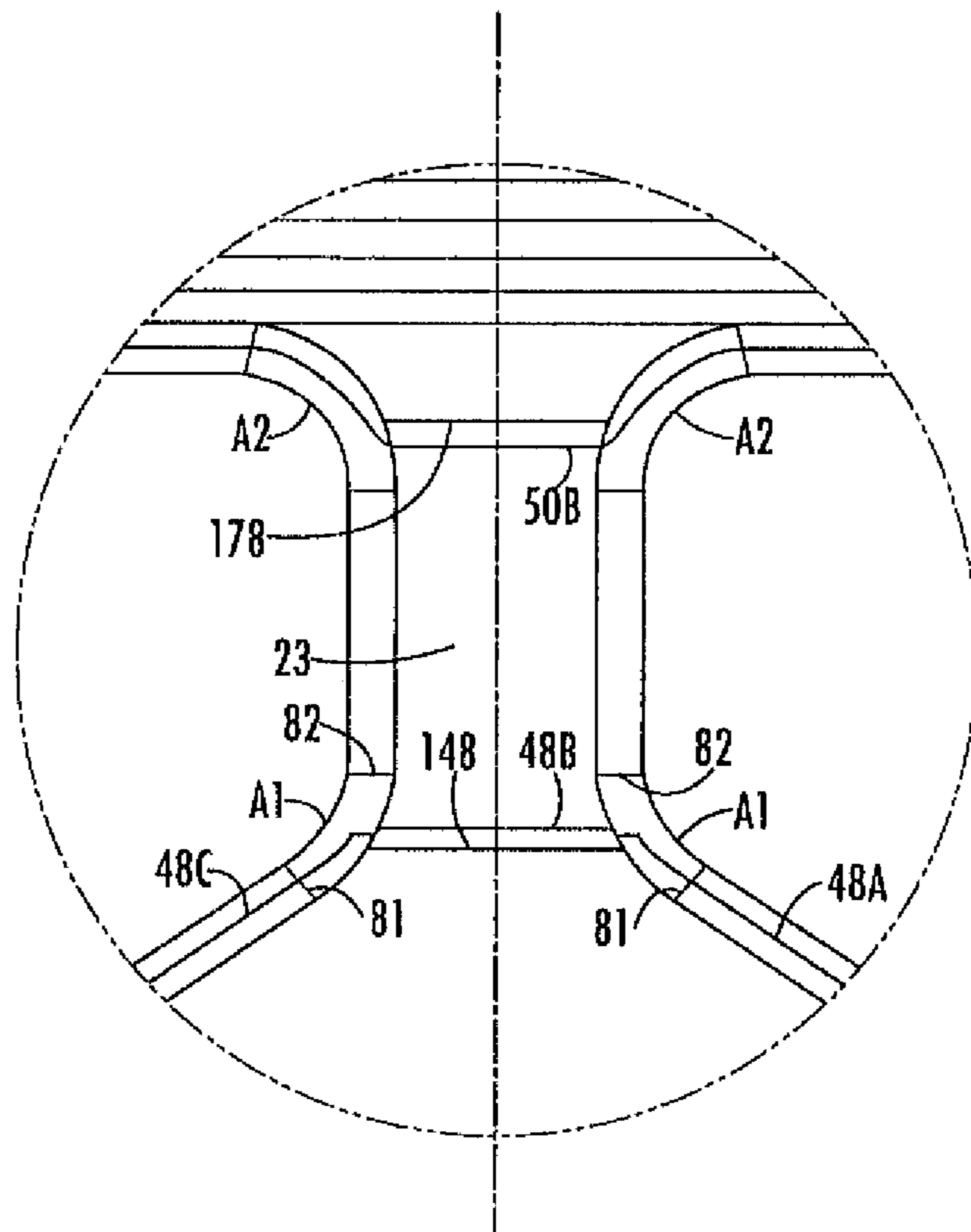


FIG. 6

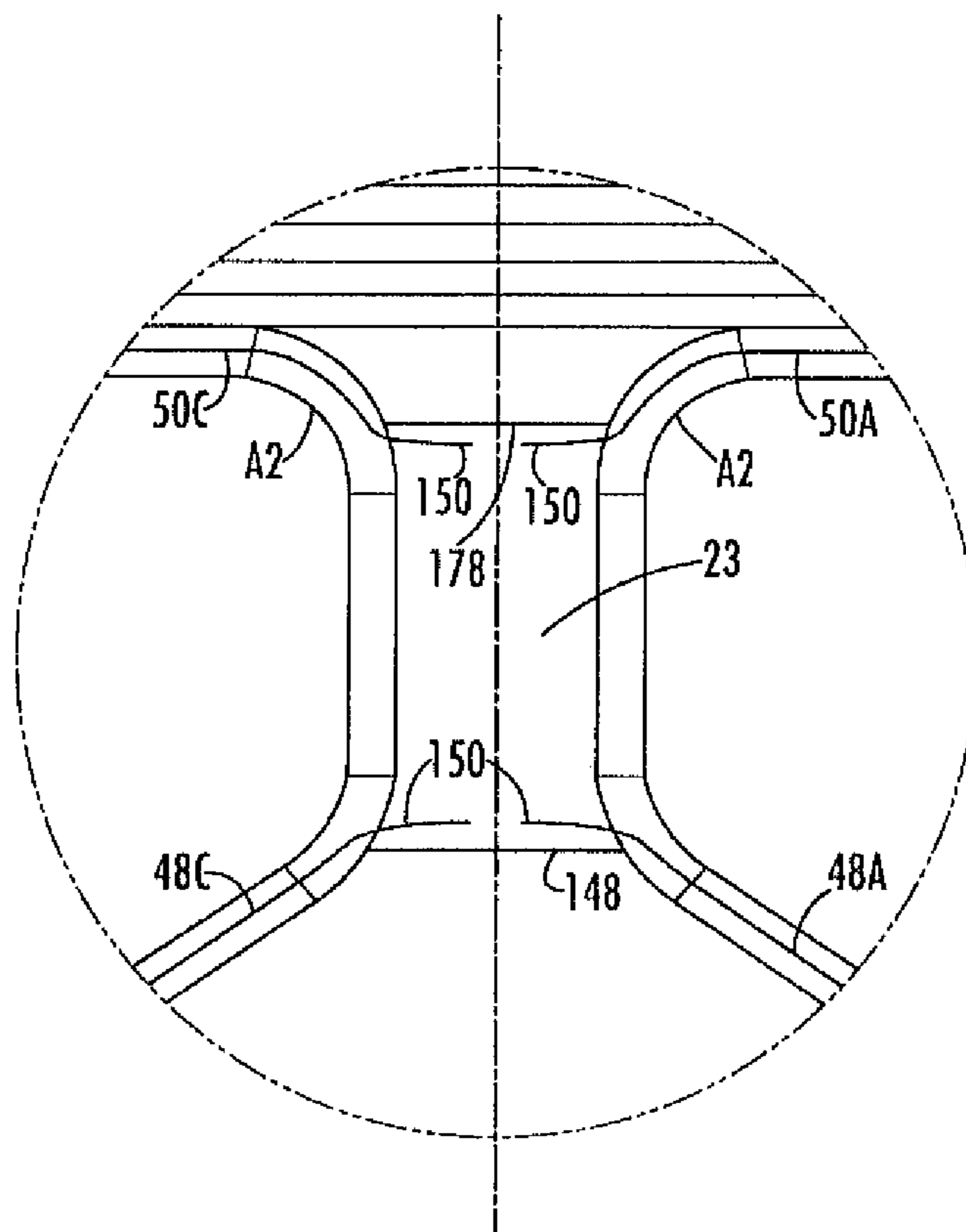


FIG. 7

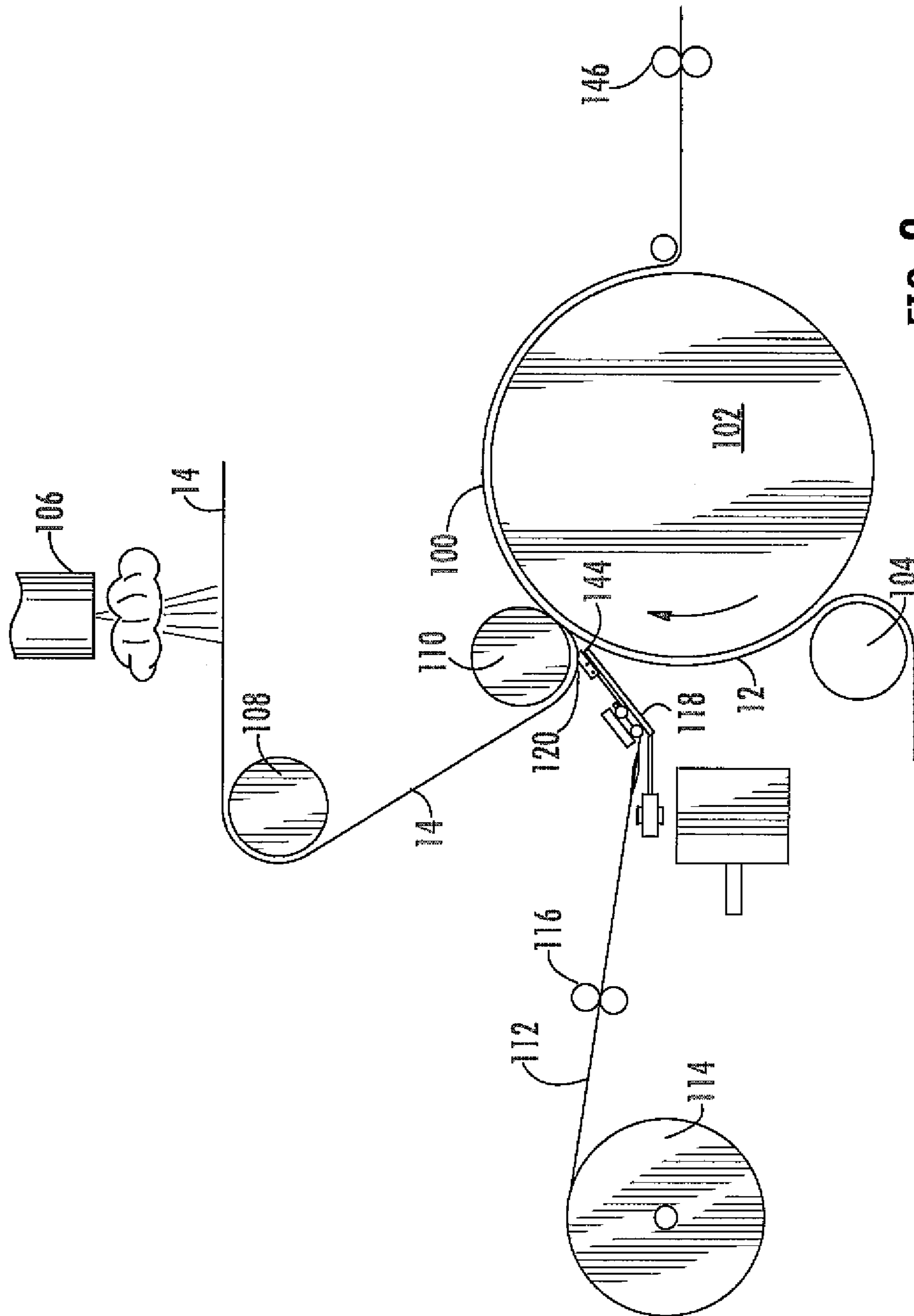


FIG. 8

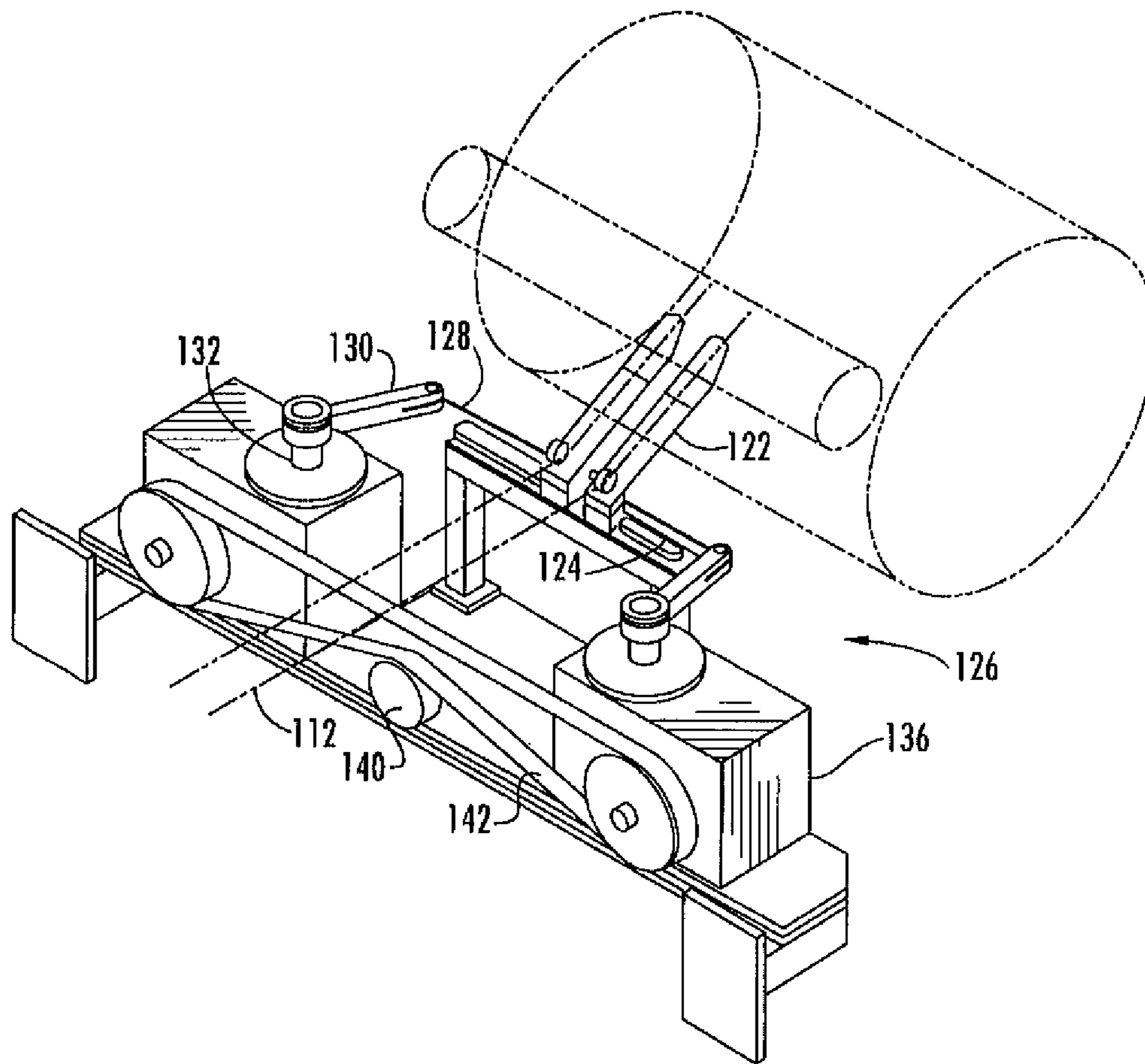


FIG. 9

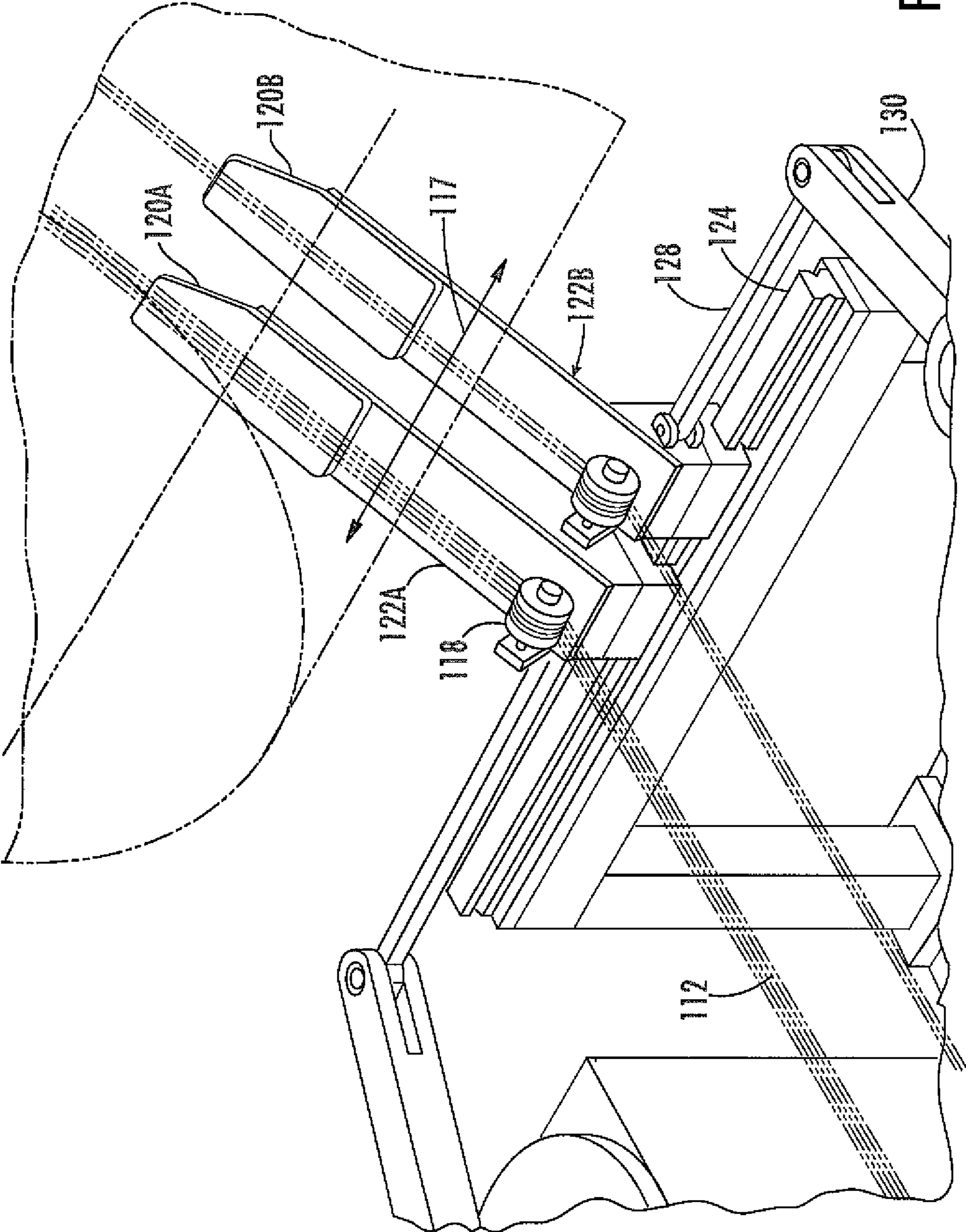


FIG. 10

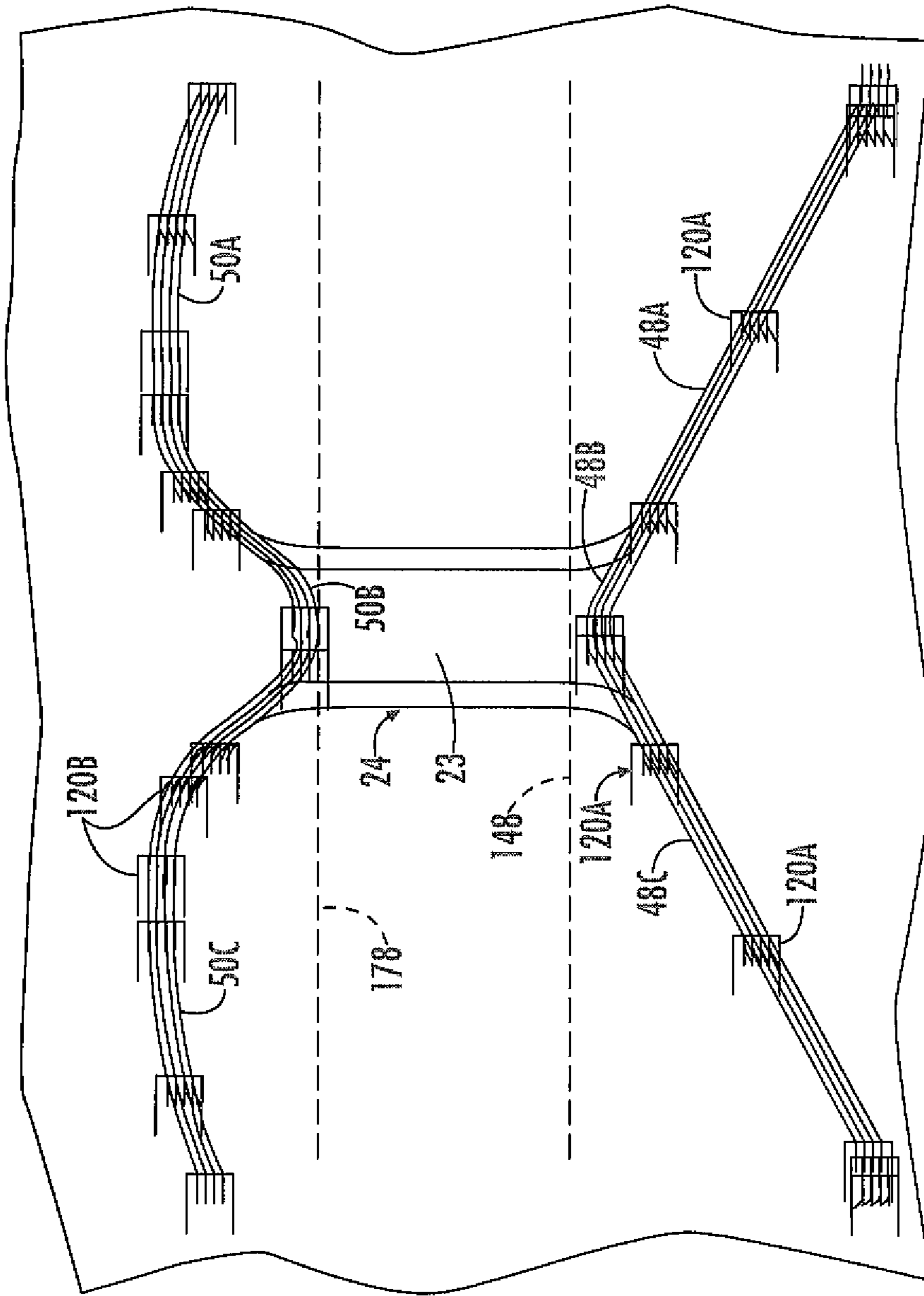


FIG. 11

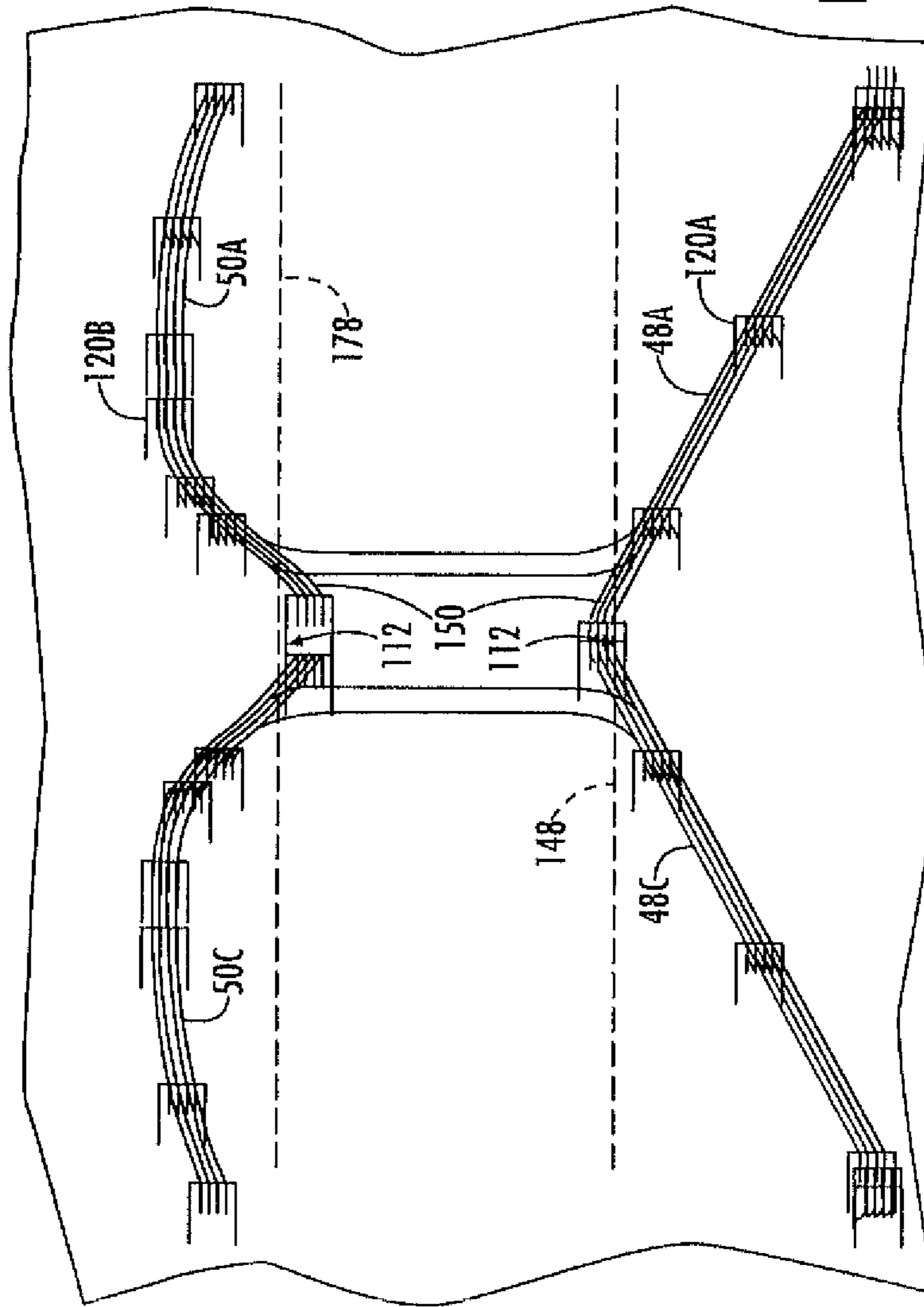
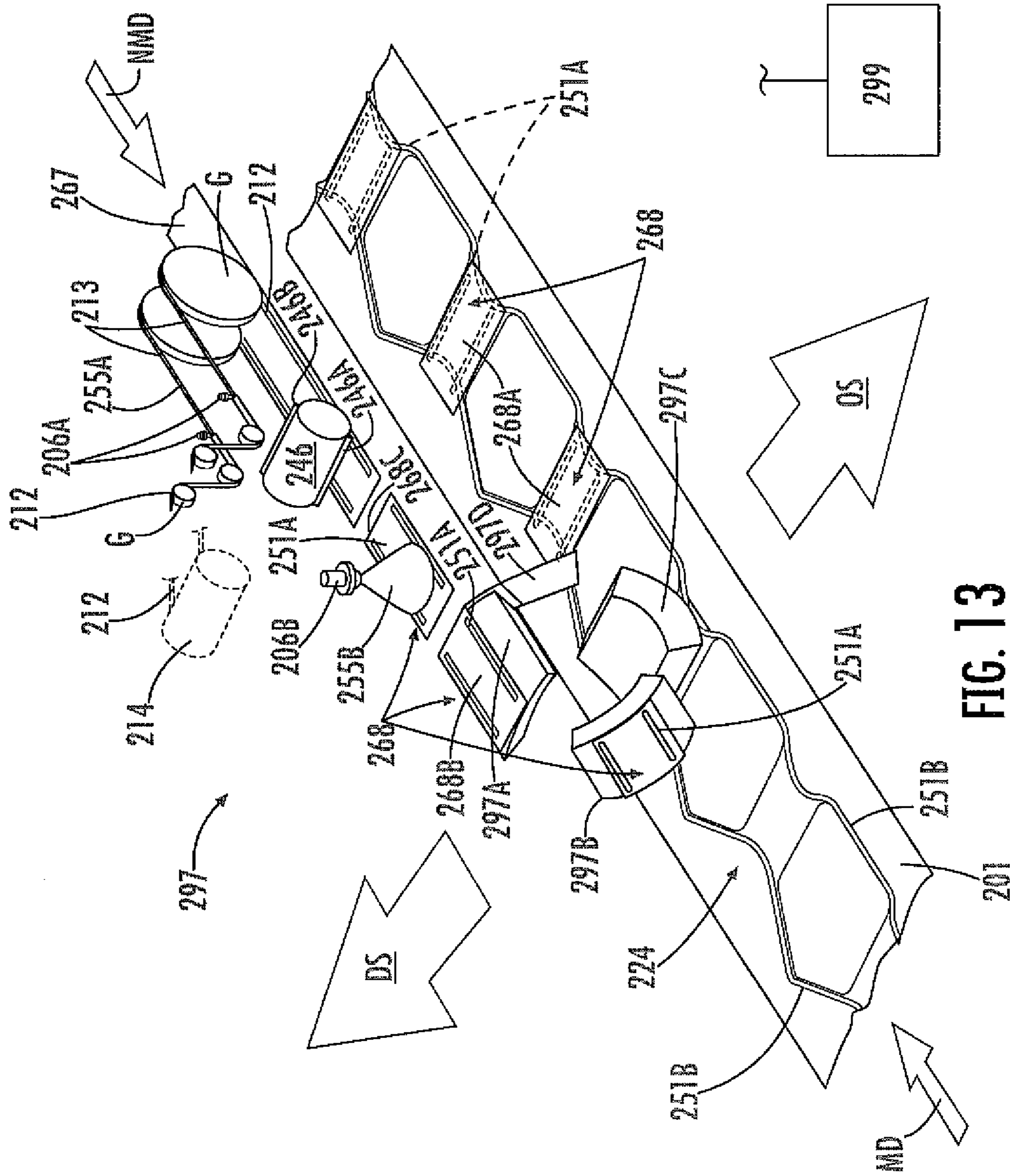


FIG. 12



**DISPOSABLE UNDERGARMENT AND
RELATED MANUFACTURING EQUIPMENT
AND PROCESSES**

RELATED APPLICATIONS

The present application is a continuation application of and claims priority to co-pending U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/240,262, filed Sep. 30, 2005, which is a continuation-in-part application of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/548,231, filed Apr. 12, 2000, now abandoned, which is a continuation of prior U.S. patent application Ser. No. 08/937,225, filed Sep. 11, 1997, now U.S. Pat. No. 6,049,916, which is a divisional of prior U.S. patent application Ser. No. 08/382,108 filed on Jan. 31, 1995, now U.S. Pat. No. 5,745,922, each of which are incorporated herein by reference in their entirety.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Undergarments are made typically of cotton and/or synthetic materials. The cotton and synthetic panties typically do not offer barrier protection. Often the synthetic undergarments have a cotton lined crotch to absorb vaginal discharges or perspiration. The absorbent/barrier properties of regular undergarments are minimal such that any vaginal discharge and/or heavy perspiration may strike through onto outer clothing; i.e., liquid penetrates from the interior to the exterior of the panty.

Panty liners and feminine care sanitary napkins or pads used with regular undergarments have polyethylene backings that provide some barrier properties inhibiting liquid strike through. However, if the vaginal discharge extends to the sides or the ends of the pads, the discharge can leak or seep around an edge of the pad and onto the undergarment. Such leakage can stain the undergarment. Depending upon the amount of leakage, liquid may strike through or go around the undergarment and stain outer clothing and/or bedding. Women with heavy liquid flows may often use one or more maxi pads, double pads and/or tampons alone, or in combination, and change these pads and tampons frequently to prevent embarrassing, messy leakage around the edges of the pads and/or staining of outer clothing. In some cases, during their heaviest flow days, some women will restrict their activities and stay home.

Many women experience some leakage of menses from their pads to their undergarments. This varies from being limited to a small number of pads leaking onto only the undergarment during light flow to more prevalent leakage onto the wearer's outer clothing on pads worn during heavy flow. Normally this leakage occurs at the side of the pad, although end leakage is also a problem. Placement of maxi pads and overnight pads in the crotch of regular undergarments shows that, at best, the pads lay on the leg elastic and, at worst, overhang the leg elastics. This causes side leakage onto the undergarment and possibly onto outer clothing. Typical leakage from the pads is caused by poor fit of the pad to the body, improper positioning of the pad by the user and lack of absorbency. Leakage from the undergarment onto the outer clothing is typically due to incompatibility between the pad width and the panty crotch width and/or lack of barrier properties in the panty material around the edge portion of the pad.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention broadly includes a three dimensional, disposable, discrete panty, subassemblies of the panty, and apparatus and methods for making the panty.

In one aspect of the invention, a method for attaching elastic to a crotch area of an undergarment includes the steps of cutting an elastic thread into a plurality of elastic sections; providing a secondary absorbent for receipt of at least one of the elastic sections, the secondary absorbent defining an inner side and an opposing outer side; attaching the elastic sections to the inner side of the secondary absorbent as the elastic sections and the secondary absorbent move in a machine direction; maneuvering the secondary absorbent with the elastic sections attached thereto to a non-machine direction; and attaching the secondary absorbent to a garment web moving in the machine direction, the elastic sections of the inner side disposed against an inner crotch portion of the garment web, the opposing outer side visible in the crotch portion. In this aspect, each elastic section is from about one inch to about three inches in length. Also in this aspect, the elastic sections are attached to the inner side of the secondary absorbent by an adhesive.

According to a further aspect of the invention, a disposable garment assembly includes a disposable garment defining a length and a width and including an outer cover having a front body portion and a back body portion, the front body portion and the back body portion being connected by a crotch portion, the outer cover, when laid out flat, having a length and a width, the front body portion and the back body portion being connected together to form a waist opening, a first leg opening and a second leg opening, the first and second leg openings having respective first and second front and back leg edge portions and corresponding first and second side leg edge portions connecting the front and back leg edge portions, the outer cover comprising a first layer, and a second layer having a front portion and a back portion, the second layer front portion disposed adjacent the front body portion of the outer cover, the second layer back portion disposed adjacent the back body portion of the outer cover; a first absorbent defining a length and a width, each respectively less than the length and the width of the disposable garment, the first absorbent further including a liquid impermeable outer sheet and a liquid permeable inner sheet, the liquid impermeable outer sheet having a front portion and a back portion, and a center portion therebetween, each of the liquid impermeable outer sheet front and back portions of the first absorbent disposed adjacent one of the respective second layer front and back body portions of the outer cover, the first absorbent having a first absorbent capacity; a second absorbent including a first side and a second side and having a second absorbent capacity, the second absorbent attached in the crotch portion and covering the width of the first absorbent, the second absorbent underlying the first absorbent on the liquid impermeable outer sheet of the first absorbent, the first side of the second absorbent disposed facing the liquid impermeable outer sheet, the first absorbent capacity of the first absorbent being greater than the second absorbent capacity of the second absorbent; and a plurality of crotch elastics extendably affixed between the outer cover and the second side of the second absorbent proximate the crotch portion, the second absorbent affixed to the outer cover.

In this aspect of the invention, the second absorbent capacity of the second absorbent is about one-half the absorbent capacity of the first absorbent. For instance, the second absorbent capacity of the second absorbent can be about 3 grams to about 6 grams, more particularly, about 4 grams to about 6 grams. Also in this aspect of the invention, the second absorbent is a stain shield.

In a further aspect of the invention, a disposable garment has a length and a width, and includes an outer cover having front and back body portions connected by a crotch portion,

the outer cover, when laid out flat, having a length between first and second ends and a width between first and second sides, the front and back body portions being connected together to form a waist opening and first and second leg opening. The outer cover in this aspect includes a first layer; a second layer having front and back body portions overlying respective front and back body portions of the outer cover; and a stain shield incorporated into the disposable garment, the stain shield having a length and a width and a garment facing side, the garment facing side having a front portion, a back portion and a center portion therebetween, the garment facing side of the center portion having a plurality of extensible crotch elastic pieces attached thereto proximate the crotch portion, the extensible crotch elastic pieces being disposed between the garment facing side and the outer cover of the crotch portion, the stain shield affixed to the outer cover, each of the garment facing side front and back portions of the stain shield disposed adjacent one of the respective second layer front and back portions, at least a portion of the stain shield having an overall total absorbent capacity of about 3 grams to about 6 grams. Also in this aspect, at least a portion of the absorbent has an overall total absorbent capacity of about 4 grams to about 6 grams.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The present invention will be more fully understood and further advantages will become apparent when reference is made to the following detailed description of the invention and the drawings, in which:

FIG. 1 is a plan view of a garment subassembly according to an aspect of the invention;

FIG. 2 is a plan view of the garment subassembly of FIG. 1, including a secondary absorbent in the crotch;

FIG. 3 is a cross section of the garment subassembly taken along line 3-3 of FIG. 2;

FIG. 4 is a cross section of the garment subassembly taken along line 4-4 of FIG. 2;

FIG. 5 is a perspective view of a disposable panty according to another aspect of the invention;

FIGS. 6 and 7 are enlarged cut-away views of a fragment of the subassembly of FIG. 1, particularly showing cross-crotch elastics in detail;

FIG. 8 is a side elevation view of an equipment layout for fabricating and processing subassemblies according to another aspect of the invention;

FIGS. 9 and 10 are pictorial views of a nip area of the elevation shown in FIG. 8;

FIG. 11 is a plan view showing transverse positioning of front and back leg elastics along an advancing web as an outer cover layer and a body side layer are being joined according to an aspect of the invention;

FIG. 12 is a plan view as in FIG. 10, showing an alternate pattern for elastic threads; and

FIG. 13 is a perspective view showing steps in a method for cutting a plurality of elastics and attaching the elastics to a secondary absorbent according to another aspect of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The following detailed description is made in the context of an article including a disposable panty, and corresponding panty subassemblies, for holding a sanitary pad in place as a primary absorbent during use of the panty. It is readily apparent, however, that the present invention can be employed with

other disposable sanitary articles, such as feminine tampons, incontinent garments and the like.

The panty subassembly 10 of FIG. 1 illustrates an embodiment of a two-layer panty subassembly prior to incorporation of the secondary absorbent. The panty subassembly of FIG. 2 illustrates the finished panty including all elements, but before the final steps of assembling the composite to form the panty structure. FIG. 5 shows the finally-assembled disposable panty structure.

Referring to FIGS. 1-3, the panty subassembly 10 has an outer cover layer 12 generally defining the overall length "L1" and width "W1" of the subassembly, and a body side layer 14 secured to the outer cover layer. The panty subassembly 10 generally includes a front body portion 16 terminating at a front waist portion 18 as a first edge of the subassembly, a back body portion 20 terminating at a back waist portion 22 as a second edge of the subassembly, and a crotch portion 24.

The body side layer 14 includes a front layer element 19 generally overlying and secured to the outer cover layer 12 on the front body portion 16, and a back layer element 21 generally overlying and secured to the outer cover layer 12 on the back body portion 20. A space 23 separates the front layer element 19 from the back layer element 21.

Referring to FIGS. 2 and 5, for assembling the subassembly of FIG. 2 to form a panty 25 as in FIG. 5, a first side edge 26 of front body portion 16 is assembled with a first side edge 28 of the back body portion 20 to form a first side seal 30. Similarly, a second side edge 32 of the front body portion 16 is assembled with a second side edge 34 of the back body portion 20 to form a second side seal 36. The waist portions 18, 22 when assembled form a waist opening 38 for putting on and taking off the panty 25. The waist opening 38 is surrounded at least in part by a waist elastic 40. The waist elastic 40 is stretched and attached to the waist portions 18, 22 in the stretched state. The waist elastic 40 is released after attachment to produce waist folds or pleats 42 to allow expansion of the waist opening 38 so that the panty 25 can fit various sizes of people. Because users of this invention generally prefer a brief style panty, the front waist portion 18 preferably comes as high as the navel and is level around the wearer's waist. Having the panty at this height provides a snug fit. Alternative panty styles include bikini (e.g. regular leg cut or french leg cut) and hipster (e.g. regular leg cut or french leg cut).

Referring to FIGS. 1 and 5, the front body portion 16, the back body portion 20, and the crotch portion 24, in combination, form left and right leg openings 44 and 46, respectively, which are generally circular or oval in shape in the finally assembled panty 25. The leg openings 44 and 46 are formed by cutting away portions of the outer cover layer 12, and corresponding portions of body side layer 14. Each leg opening 44, 46 is surrounded at least in part by a back leg elastic 48, a front leg elastic 50, and a crotch elastic 51 between the back leg elastic and the front leg elastic. Each of the respective elastics 48, 50, 51 is adjacent the respective one of the edges 52 of the corresponding leg openings. The front and back leg elastics 48, 50 are secured between the outer cover layer 12 and the body side layer 14 by adhesive 55. The crotch elastics 51 are secured between outer cover layer 12 and a crotch elastic support sheet 53, also by adhesive 55. The elastics 48, 50, 51 are in the stretched state when secured to the outer cover layer 12. Accordingly, when the elastics, the outer cover layer, the body side layer, and the support sheet 53, are released after the elastics are secured to the outer cover layer, the elastics produce leg folds or pleats 54 at the edges of the leg openings 44, 46 to allow expansion of the leg openings 44, 46 to fit various sizes of legs.

The front body portion **16** may be divided into a front upper portion **56** and a front lower portion **58**. Similarly, the back body portion **20** may be divided into a back upper portion **60** and a back lower portion **62**. The upper portions **56** and **60** are preferably designed to include body elastics **64** which readily stretch to allow the wearer to put on the panty **25** and then readily contract to resume the normal release state of the body elastics. This ensures a close or snug fit to different body sizes and forms. A number of body elastics **64** are positioned on both the front and the back portions **56**, **60**, respectively, at positions between the waist opening **38** and the leg openings **44**, **46**, so that the panty **25** has a good fit, particularly around the body.

The lower body portions **58**, **62** generally do not require the spaced elastics as in the upper body portions **56**, **60**, although the elastic threads may be used.

The width of the crotch portion **24** between the left and right crotch elastics **51** should be wide enough to accommodate laying the primary absorbent **66** between the edges **52** without having the primary absorbent **66** obstruct the crotch elastics **51**. This allows the crotch elastics **51** to contract and draw up the sides of the crotch about the primary absorbent, to thus accommodate the thickness of the primary absorbent **66**, and to give surface area within the crotch portion **24** of the panty, adjacent edges **52**, to contain leakage from the primary absorbent **66**.

The width of the crotch portion **24** between the elastics **51** should not be so wide as to seem bulky or uncomfortable. A suitable width is at least about 2.75 inches (70 mm) between the crotch elastics. Width of crotch portion **24** is advantageous from about 3 inches (76 mm) to about 3.5 inches (89 mm). Preferably, the width is about 3 inches (76 mm).

Preferably, the crotch elastics **51** are from about 0.375 inch (10 mm) to about 0.625 inch (16 mm) wide. More preferably, the width is about 0.5 inch (13 mm). Preferably, ruffle material on the edge of the leg openings **44**, **46** outside the leg and crotch elastics **48**, **50**, **51** is less than about 0.25 (6 mm). More preferably, the ruffle material is less than about 0.125 inch (3 mm). It is most desirable to eliminate any ruffle material from the edges of the leg openings **44**, **46**.

The overall width of the crotch portion **24** includes the width between the left and right crotch elastics **51**, the width of the crotch elastics, and any ruffle material outside the crotch elastics to the edges **52** of the leg openings. Preferably, the overall width of the crotch portion **24** should be at least about 4 inches (102 mm).

FIG. 2 shows the panty subassembly **10** of FIG. 1 with a secondary absorbent **68** secured in the crotch portion **24**, over the outer cover layer **12** and parts of the front and back layer elements **19**, **21** of the body side layer **14**. The width of the secondary absorbent **68** is sized in relation to the width of the crotch portion **24**. Preferably, the width of the secondary absorbent **68** is at least the width of the crotch portion **24** between the crotch elastics **51**. More preferably, the width of the secondary absorbent is equivalent to the overall width of the crotch portion **24**.

The secondary absorbent **68** should have sufficient capacity to absorb any flow or seepage of body fluid around or through the primary absorbent **66**. The secondary absorbent **68** should preferably have a capacity and thickness substantially less than that of the primary absorbent **66**, thus providing a nonbulky and flexible fit. The secondary absorbent **68** should have a total capacity of about one-half the capacity of the primary absorbent **66**. Preferably, the secondary absorbent **68** should have a total capacity of at least about 3 grams and not more than 6 grams. More preferably, the total capacity of the secondary absorbent **68** should be from about 4 grams

to about 6 grams. However, the basis weight of, or the type of, the secondary absorbent **68** should be selected to provide resistance to flexibility of less than around 400 grams, as measured by INDA Standard Test method IST 90.3-92 Standard Test Method for Handle-O-Meter Stiffness of Nonwoven Fabrics.

The secondary absorbent has a low stiffness. The low stiffness allows the absorbent and its barrier to remain attached to the conformable outer cover layer **12** and the body side layer **14** which conform to a wide range of body sizes and shapes. Preferably, the secondary absorbent has a stiffness of less than 400 grams along any axis tested, more preferably less than 300 grams along any axis and less than 100 grams along the axis parallel to the waist opening. The secondary absorbent alone will have a stiffness of less than 250 grams and preferably less than 100 grams along any axis and more preferably less than 75 grams along the axis parallel to the waist opening.

The overall length of the secondary absorbent **68** should be adequate to extend beyond the ends of the primary absorbent **66**, in order to be properly positioned to receive liquid which flows or seeps around the edges of the primary absorbent **66**. This overall length is typically at least about 15 inches (382 mm) thus extending beyond the crotch portion **24** along the longitudinal centerline A-A of the subassembly **10**. The length should be in the range of about 15 inches (382 mm) to about 19 inches (484 mm). Preferably, the length of the secondary absorbent **68** is about 17 inches (433 mm).

The width of the secondary absorbent **68** beyond the crotch portion **24** should be at least as wide as the width of the crotch portion **24**. The width of the secondary absorbent **68** may be narrowed beyond the crotch portion **24** but may thus compromise the containment of liquid flowing or seeping from the primary absorbent. More preferably, the width outside the crotch portion is wider than in the crotch portion, and is from about 5 inches (127 mm) to about 12 inches (306 mm), alternatively from about 5.5 inches (140 mm) to about 7.5 inches (191 mm). Preferably, the width is about 6.5 inches (165 mm).

Referring to FIGS. 2, 3, and 4, the waist elastics **40**, the body elastics **64**, and the leg elastics **48**, **50**, **51** are generally covered by the front and back layer elements **19**, **21** of the body side layer **14**.

Both outer cover layer **12** and body side layer **14** are compliant and soft feeling to the wearer. The following description of materials from which the outer cover layer **12** can be made applies equally to the material of the body side layer **14**.

The outer cover layer **12** may be liquid pervious, permitting liquids to readily penetrate into its thickness, or impervious, resistant to the penetration of liquids into its thickness. Outer cover layer **12** may be made from a wide range of materials, such as natural fibers (e.g. wood or cotton fibers), synthetic fibers (e.g. polyester or polypropylene fibers) or from a combination of natural and synthetic fibers or reticulated foams and apertured plastic films. The outer cover layer **12** may be woven, nonwoven such as spunbonded, carded, or the like. A suitable outer cover layer **12** is carded, and thermally bonded by means well known to those skilled in the fabric art. Alternatively, the outer cover layer **12** is derived from a spunbonded web. In preferred embodiments, the outer cover layer is spunbonded polypropylene nonwoven with a wireweave bond pattern having a grab tensile of 19 pounds as measured by ASTM D1682 and Do, a Taber 40 cycle abrasion rating of 3.0 as measured by ASTM Do and Handle-O-Meter MD value of 6.6 grams and CD value of 4.4 grams using TAPPI method To. Such spunbonded material is available from Kimberly-Clark Corporation, Roswell, Ga. The outer

cover layer **12** has a weight of from about 0.3 ounce per square yard (osy) to about 2.0 osy, preferably about 0.7 osy.

The position and shape of the leg openings **44**, **46** are important to avoid tightness in the crotch and groin area of the wearer, to obtain adequate buttocks coverage, and to prevent the panty **25** from tilting forward, e.g. tilting such that the front waist edge dips lower in relationship to the back waist edge. FIGS. **1** and **2** illustrate the most preferred design for leg fit and buttocks coverage. The shape of the curve across the top of the leg is important. If the curve is too deep, the panty **25** will shift downward and backward resulting in a short front waist, increased back length and bagginess in the seat of the panty. This would cause the panty **25** to appear tilted when worn as evidenced by an unevenness around the waist of the wearer.

Thus, the majority of the front leg edge portion **70** of the front portion of each leg opening **44**, **46** is defined by a straight section **72** having a length "L2" at least about 70% of the length "L3" of the entire front leg edge portion **70**. The straight section **72** should form an angle with the centerline A-A of between about 75 degrees and about 100 degrees, and most preferably about 90 degrees.

With the panty subassembly **10** laid out flat as in FIG. **1**, the majority of the back leg edge portion **74** of the back portion of each leg is defined by a straight section **76** having a length "L4" at least about 70% of the length "L5" of the entire back leg edge portion **74**. The straight section **76** forms an acute angle with the longitudinal centerline A-A of the subassembly **10**. More preferably, the straight section **76** of the back leg edge portion **74** forms an acute angle α with the centerline A-A of the panty **25** of between about 50 degrees and 65 degrees and most preferably about 60 degrees.

The majority of the edge **78** of the crotch portion of each leg opening **44**, **46** is defined by a straight section **80** having a length "L6." Preferably, the straight sections **80** are straight for at least about 70% of the entire lengths "L7" of the respective edges **78**.

Each back leg edge portion **74** includes an arcuate section "A1" extending from one end **81** of the respective straight section **76** to a second end **82** connecting the respective back leg edge portion.

Each front leg edge portion **70** includes an arcuate section "A2" extending from one end **84** of the respective straight section **72** to a second end **86** connecting the respective front leg edge portion **70** to the front end of edge **78** of the respective crotch portion.

The shape of the arcuate section "A2" at the inner groin area is important. If the arc is too shallow, tightness may be experienced at the inner groin area.

The preferred narrow crotch width reduces coverage of the buttocks. To compensate for such reduction, the arcuate section "A1" is preferably adjusted toward back waist portion **22**, such that the end **82** of the arcuate section "A1" should be positioned slightly forward of centerline B-B as shown in FIGS. **1** and **2**.

The waist, leg, and body elastics **40**, **48**, **50**, **64** respectively are attached to the panty subassembly **10**, generally between the outer cover layer **12** and the body side layer **14**, using apparatus and processes described hereinafter.

Materials suitable for elastics include a wide variety including but not limited to elastic strands, yarn rubber, flat rubber (e.g. as bands), elastic tape, film-type rubber, polyurethane, and, tape-like elastomer, or foam polyurethane or formed elastic scrim. Each elastic may be unitary, multipart, or composite in construction.

Waist elastic **40** is typically about 0.5 inch (13 mm) wide. The elastic may comprise threads, ribbons, a film, or com-

posite. The threads or ribbons may be multiple and may be applied as a composite. Preferably, the waist elastic is threads, more preferably four threads are used as the elastic and the threads are spaced about 0.17 inch (4.3 mm) apart. The threads may be made of any suitable elastomeric material. One suitable material is spandex such as Lycra® threads available from Dupont located in Wilmington, Del. Suitable waist elastics include threads having a total decitex (g/1000 m) of about 3760 for 0.5 inch (13 mm) wide elastic. Adhesive **55** is used to bond the elastic between the outer cover layer **12** and the body side layer **14**. A suitable adhesive includes, for example Findley H2096 hot melt adhesive, available from Findley Adhesives, Milwaukee, Wis.

The leg elastics **48**, **50**, and crotch elastic **51**, including multiple threads in each, are typically about 0.5 inch (13 mm) wide. The elastic may comprise threads, ribbons, a film or composite. The threads, ribbons, etc., may be multiple and may be applied as a composite. The front leg elastics and the crotch elastics may be threads, preferably numbering three threads which are spaced about 0.17 inch (4.3 mm) apart. Back leg elastics numbering up to six threads may have a width of about 0.75 inch (19 mm) and a spacing of about 0.15 inch (3.8 mm) apart. The threads may be made of any suitable elastomeric material. One suitable material is spandex such as Lycra® threads available from Dupont, Wilmington, Del. Suitable leg elastics include threads having a total decitex (g/1000 m) of about 3760 for a 0.5 inch (13 mm) wide elastic. Adhesive **55** is used to bond the several elastics **48**, **50**, and **51** to the outer cover layer **12**, the body side layer **14**, and the support sheet **53**.

To provide a snug leg fit and to draw up the sides of the crotch portion **24** to a cradle to receive the primary absorbent, the leg elastics **48**, **50**, and the crotch elastics **51**, are elongated when applied to the layers **12** and **14** respectively. Preferably, the leg elastics **48**, **50** are applied in multiple segments, with the amount of elongation of each segment while being incorporated into the subassembly **10** being determined according to the position to be occupied by the respective segment. In the case of only front and back leg elastics, the front leg elastics are elongated less than the back elastics. In the case of front elastics, back elastics, and crotch elastics, the front and crotch elastics are elongated less than the back elastics. Preferably, the front and crotch elastics are elongated to about 150% and the back elastics along the leg openings are elongated to about 250%. The differing tensions allow easier attachment of the primary absorbent pad **66**, less tightness in the groin area, and less bunching of the crotch portion **24** caused by high leg elastic retraction. The back leg elastic is under higher elongation to help keep the seat of the panty from creeping up with movement during use.

Referring now to FIGS. **1**, **6**, and **7**, the suggested six (back) and three (front) threads of elastic on the respective back and front leg elastics **48** and **50** are each represented as single threads **112** of elastic. The following description of the characteristics and use of the single threads applies to the usual multiple threads suggested above.

The composite of the elastics extending about each of the leg openings **44** and **46** comprises a portion of the back leg elastics **48**, a portion of the front leg elastics **50**, and one of the left and right crotch elastics **51**. Referring specifically to FIGS. **1**, **6**, and **7**, the back leg elastic **48** extends, as a first section **48A**, from a first locus **92** at or propinquant the edge **28** of the subassembly, width-wise across the subassembly at a substantially consistent acute angle α . with the centerline A-A that takes it toward a first edge of the subassembly at front waist portion **18**, and generally following the back leg edge portion **74** of the leg opening **46** along the straight

section 76A and onto the first arcuate section "A1" toward the crotch portion 24, generally terminating in the first arcuate section "A1," at or near the crotch portion 24. Back leg elastic 48 extends, as a second section 48B, from the first arcuate section "A1" across the crotch portion to the second arcuate section "A1." From the second arcuate section "A1," the back leg elastic 48 extends, as a third section 48C, at an acute angle α , with the centerline A-A away from the front waist portion 18, and generally following the back leg edge portion 74 of the leg opening 44 along the straight section 76B to a second locus 94 at or propinquant edge 34. In the flat configuration shown for the subassembly in FIGS. 1, 6, and 7, sections 48A and 48C are elongated 250%, while section 48B is relaxed, and under no substantial elongation. Preferably, section 48B includes a modest amount of slack in the elastic.

The front leg elastic 50 extends, as a first section 50A, from a third locus 96 at or propinquant the side edge 26 of the subassembly width-wise across the subassembly and generally following the front leg edge portion 70 along its longitudinal straight section 72A, and onto the first arcuate section "A2" toward the crotch portion 24, generally terminating in the first arcuate section "A2," at or near the crotch portion 24. Front leg elastic 50 extends, as a second section 50B, from the first arcuate section "A2" across the crotch portion to the second arcuate section "A2." From the second arcuate section "A2," the front leg elastic 50 extends, as a third section 50C, width-wise across the subassembly and generally following the front leg edge portion 70 along its longitudinal straight section 72B to a fourth locus 98 at or propinquant side edge 32. In the flat configuration shown for the subassembly in FIGS. 1, 6, and 7, sections 50A and 50C are elongated 150%, while section 50B is relaxed, and under no substantial elongation. Preferably, section 50B includes a modest amount of slack in the elastic.

Thus, in the embodiment seen in FIGS. 1, 2, 6, and 11, the front and rear leg elastics extend across the width W1 of the subassembly 10 as one or more continuous threads.

The crotch elastics 51 extend generally between the back and front leg elastics 48 and 50, with respective ends of the crotch elastics generally being disposed at or near the arcuate sections "A1" and "A2." Accordingly, the elastic properties extant about each leg opening result from the combined contributions of the respective back leg section (e.g. 48A), the respective front leg section (e.g. 50A), and the respective crotch elastic 51.

The reason for providing leg elastics in multiple sections is at least two-fold. First, using multiple sections of elastics facilitates placing of the elastics on the outer cover layer 12 while maintaining advantageous production speeds. As suggested in FIGS. 1, 8, and 9, the subassembly of e.g. FIG. 1 is made as a sequence of such subassemblies in a continuous web 100, with the width "W1" of the subassembly disposed in the "with machine" direction of the processing apparatus. In such arrangement, the front and back waist elastics 40, the front and back body elastics 64, and the front and back leg elastics 48, 50 can all be assembled into the subassembly by appropriate continuous feeding of respective continuous threads of elastics into the processing apparatus in the "with machine" direction while the web 100 continuously advances in the "with machine" direction at a constant speed.

Given the orientation of the crotch elastics at essentially 90 degrees to the direction of advance of the web 100, placing the crotch elastics as a portion of a continuous element of either the front or back leg elastics would suggest either (1) momentarily and regularly stopping the advance of the web 100 while the crotch elastic is fed into place, or (2) severely slowing the web 100 and severely driving an elastics guide, in

a direction transverse to the web in order to apply the crotch elastic while the web was thus slowed. In either scenario, severe stresses would be placed on the respective drive apparatus, as well as on the web. The invention contemplates, rather, that the crotch elastics are placed in the subassembly 10 as a separate operation placing separate elastics segments, where the crotch elastics segments are first elongated and oriented transverse to the web 100, and are then placed on the web as the web passes the appropriate operating station (not shown) subsequent to placing the leg, body and waist elastics in the subassembly, though the sequence of placing the elastics is not critical.

Referring now to FIGS. 8 and 9, a first continuous web, which ultimately becomes cover layer 12, is pressed against the assembly roll 102 by turning roll 104. A second continuous web, which ultimately becomes body side layer 14, passes under adhesive applicator 106 and over turning rolls 108 and 110, and is pressed against the assembly roll 102 by turning roll 110. Elastic threads 112 are fed from a continuous supply 114 of elastic thread through feed nip 116, through thread guides 118 and sets of guide fingers 120A and 120B, and between cover layer 12 and body side layer 14 at the nip formed by assembly roll 102 and turning roll 110.

Referring especially to FIGS. 10 and 11, thread guides 118 and corresponding sets of guide fingers 120A and 120B are elements of lateral guides 122A and 122B respectively. Each of the lateral guides 122A and 122B is mounted on a transverse slide bar 124 for sliding transverse to the with machine direction of travel of the webs. Each lateral guide 122 is connected to a transverse drive mechanism 126 including linkage arms 128 and 130, vertical drive shaft 132, and a cam follower. The cam followers follow the corresponding cams inside the respective cam housings. The cams are linked to the machine drive shaft 140 by drive belt 142. Thus, the cams, and correspondingly the thread guides and the sets of guide fingers, move transversely with respect to the with machine direction of the webs as the drive shaft turns. The end result is that rotation of the processing line drive shaft 140 effects transverse motion of the thread guides and the sets of guide fingers, as indicated by the arrows in FIG. 10, in cooperation with the design of the cams and cam followers.

Referring to FIG. 8, the guide fingers 120 are positioned close to the nip 144 so that they closely control the transverse positions of the elastics with respect to the webs 12 and 14 as the webs 12 and 14 enter the nip 144 and correspondingly trap the elastics between them, fixing the position of the elastics between them by means of adhesive 55. Accordingly, the guide fingers 120 are preferably physically positioned, and provide guidance to the threads of elastic, within one inch of the nip 144. To the extent the fingers can be placed closer to the nip 144, they provide more positive guidance to the elastic. By careful design of the guide fingers 120, and by careful control of the positioning of the guide fingers 120 with respect to nip 144, the guide fingers 120 can be advantageously positioned within 0.5 inch of the line of contact defined at the nip between roll 102 and 108.

The limitation on how close the guide fingers 120 can be placed to the nip is controlled by the ability to design fingers which can affirmatively guide the threads of elastic while avoiding having the fingers themselves drawn into the nip. The criticality of urging the fingers as ultimately close as possible to the nip can be attenuated by directing the threads 112 onto the adhesive-coated layer 14 ahead of nip 144, preferably instantaneously ahead of the nip 144, as suggested by the depiction in FIG. 8. By directing the threads of elastic onto layer 14 ahead of the nip, the open distance spanned by the threads between the fingers 120 and the adhesive-coated

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layer **14** is minimized, being held to less than 0.5 inch, for example 0.25-0.375 inch (6 mm to 10 mm).

The transverse movement of the lateral guides **122**, and thus fingers **120**, as the webs advance along the processing line, creates transverse positioning of the elastics threads **112** with respect to the with machine direction of the advancing webs **12** and **14**. FIG. **11** shows the pattern of transverse movement of the sets of guide fingers **120A** and **120B** relative to the movement of the web in the with machine direction, along the processing line. In FIG. **11**, the sets of fingers **120A** and **120B** are depicted at several locations along the front and back edges of the leg openings **44**, **46**, to indicate that it is the positioning of the sets of fingers **120A** and **120B**, and the dynamic changing of that positioning by the drive mechanism **126**, that determines the instantaneous transverse location of the elastics in the web at any point and time while the elastics are being placed in the web at nip **144** as shown in FIGS. **8-11**. Comparing FIGS. **1**, **10**, and **11**, it is seen that the set of fingers **120A** generally places the threads of the back leg elastics generally parallel to each other in the web, while the set of fingers **120B** generally places the threads of the front leg elastics generally parallel to each other in the web, both along their respective portions of the designed paths defining the front leg edge portion **70** and back leg edge portion **74** of the leg openings **44** and **46**. The threads of elastic deviate slightly from their parallel relationships with each other as the elastic threads traverse paths that deviate from the with machine direction, the distance between the threads **90** being generally constant as they emerge from the fingers **120**. Such deviations from the parallel, resulting from the cross machine traverse of the elastics, are included herein within the phrase "generally parallel" as respects the relationships of the threads of elastic to each other.

It will be understood that FIG. **11** represents only one panty in the continuous sequence of panty subassemblies **10** contained in the web **100** passing through nip **144**. It will also be understood that the web passing through the nip **144** is further acted upon at cutter **146** to cut away material from the web **100** in creating the leg openings **44** and **46**.

In general, then, webs **12** and **14** are provided as substantially endless rolls from unwind stands (not shown). Web **14** is typically provided as front and back layer elements **19** and **21**. Space **23** separates the elements **19** and **21**, and generally corresponds with the crotch portion and the portion of the web **12** which is cut out to form leg openings **44** and **46**. Adhesive **55** is applied to the front and back elements **19** and **21** of web **14** by adhesive applicator **106**. Webs **12** and **14** are joined adhesively, with elastic threads being interposed between webs **12** and **14** at nip **144**, and with space **23** interposed between the front and back elements **19**, **21** of the body side layer **14**. The transverse positions of the elastics change according to a pre-set path of transverse movements, driven by the drive shaft **140** which drives and times the several operations along the processing line. The threads of elastic **112**, as placed by the guide fingers **120**, traverse respective paths that ultimately follow the front and back edges of the leg openings **44** and **46**, as defined at cutter **146**, in registration with the advance of the web, and accordingly, with the advance of the series of panty subassemblies **10** being defined in the web at nip **144** and cutter **146**. The portions of the threads of elastic located along the front and back edges of the leg openings are stretched. The portions traversing the crotch portion are relaxed. The crotch portions of the elastic are separately placed in the subassembly **10** at a later processing station, preferably downstream from the cutter **146**.

A second embodiment of the subassembly is illustrated in FIG. **12**. In the second embodiment, the front edge **148** of

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back layer element **21** is disposed rearwardly of that same edge **148** as depicted in the embodiment of FIG. **10**, while the guide fingers **120A** traverse the same path as in FIG. **10**. Accordingly, as the threads of elastic **112** extend across the crotch portion **24**, the threads **112** are guided forwardly of edge **148**, into space **23**, and are thus not held between the layers **12** and **14**, and thus are not controlled by the adhesive on layer **14**. Rather, the tension is maintained on the threads of elastic **112** across the crotch portion **24**, such that the threads retract along the edge **148** of the layer element **21** in a configuration that loosely resembles a rope under tension. The rope is subsequently cut such that the cut portions of the threads retract to positions generally defined by the intersection of the edge **148** of the back layer element **21** and the path of the threads adhesively held between layer **12** and the back layer element **21**. Thus, the threads **112** generally include loose intermediate ends **150** after being cut, as shown in FIG. **7**.

Body elastics **64** and waist elastics **40** can be incorporated at nip **144** in the conventional manner of providing stationary feeds and guides at the nip.

In another embodiment of the invention shown in FIG. **13**, a section of web processing equipment **297** is shown including a drive side DS and an operator side OS. As generally shown, a plurality of elastic threads **212** are attached to a stain shield or secondary absorbent web **267**, and the secondary absorbent **267** and attached elastic threads **212** are cut to create a plurality of stain shields **268** having respective elastic pieces or sections **251A** attached thereto. The elasticized stain shields **268** are maneuvered as shown and attached to a garment web **201** to form a garment blank subassembly. This garment blank subassembly is similar in many ways to the embodiments described above; therefore, only certain features of this embodiment are described below for the sake of brevity and reference is made to the foregoing descriptions for like or similar components of the garment blank subassembly to enable this aspect of the invention.

With more particular reference to FIG. **13**, the processing equipment **297** supplies the plurality of elastic threads **212** from an elastic thread roll **214** generally in a machine direction MD. The elastic threads **212** are routed by a series of guide rollers G in a known manner and are attached in a stretched condition in a non-machine direction (NMD) in this example to the secondary absorbent web **267** using an adhesive **255A**. As shown, the adhesive **255A** is applied intermittently to the elastic threads **212** by a plurality of applicators **206A** to form a plurality of adhesive gaps **213** along the elastic threads **212**. The cutter **246** cuts the secondary absorbent web **267** into the stain shields **268** at each adhesive gap **213**. As further shown, the stain shield **268** the resultant sections **251A** are attached to a first or inner side **268B**, which opposes a second or outer side **268A** discussed further below.

The exemplary cutter **246** shown in FIG. **13** is a roller cutter having a plurality of blades **246A,B** attached thereto for cutting the elastic sections **251A** at the adhesive gaps **213** as discussed above. The cutter **246** is controlled by a controller **299** disposed on the operator side OS of the processing equipment **297** in this example. Those skilled in the art will instantly recognize that the controller **299** can be a computer or a programmable logic controller, which can be programmed to cut the elastic threads **212** at the adhesive gaps **213** based on a passage of time or a sensed length of passing elastic threads **212** to create the sections **251A**. As shown, each end of each section **251A**, which formed the gaps **213** in the elastic threads **212** before the elastic threads **212** were cut, retract after being cut to create a retraction area **268C** on the

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outer side 268B. In this example, the sections 251A are from about one (1) inch to about three (3) inches in length.

As further shown in FIG. 13, a second adhesive applicator 206B applies a second amount of adhesive 255B to the outer sides 268B of the stain shields 268. As shown, a plurality of applicator assembly segments 297A-D subsequently maneuver or rotate the adhesive coated stain shields 268 transverse to the machine direction MD. As further shown, the applicator assembly segments 297A-D affix the adhesive coated outer sides 268B and the underlying elastic sections 251A to the garment web 201 with the inner sides 268A facing upward or outward from within a crotch area or portion 224. As shown, the inner sides 268A are located between a plurality of garment elastics 251B. In this manner, the individual elastic sections 251A are rapidly manipulated, positioned and attached to the crotch area 224 without having to maneuver the entire garment web 201 and/or cut the elastic threads 212 and apply the elastic sections 251A to the crotch portions 224 through acute angles at high machine speeds.

Wherever herein this teaching refers to “multiple” elements, e.g. multiple threads of elastic or multiple paths of traverse, any two or more such elements are included.

Having thus described the invention in full detail, it will be readily apparent that various changes and modifications may be made without departing from the spirit of the invention. All such changes and modifications are contemplated as being within the scope of the present invention, as defined by the following claims.

That which is claimed is:

1. A disposable garment comprising:
 - a front body portion, a back body portion, and a crotch portion in between the front body portion and the back body portion, the front body portion and the back body portion being connected together to form a waist opening, a first leg opening, and a second leg opening, the first leg opening being surrounded by a first front leg edge portion, a first back leg edge portion, and a first crotch leg edge portion positioned in between the first front leg edge portion and the first back leg edge portion, the second leg opening being surrounded by a second front leg edge portion, a second back leg edge portion, and second crotch leg edge portion positioned in between the second front leg edge portion and the second back leg edge portion;
 - an absorbent located at least within the crotch portion;
 - a first elastic having a first end near a first side edge of the front body portion and extending along the first front leg edge portion and the second front leg edge portion to a second end near a second side edge of the front body portion, the first elastic having been cut to form a first front intermediate end spaced from a second front intermediate end;
 - a second elastic having a first end near a first side edge of the back body portion and extending along the first back leg edge portion and along the second back leg edge portion to a second end near a second side edge of the back body portion, the second elastic having been cut to form a first back intermediate end spaced from a second back intermediate end; and
 - a plurality of opposing crotch elastics extendably affixed to opposing edges of the crotch portion in between the first elastic and the second elastic on each side of the crotch portion.
2. A disposable garment as in claim 1, wherein the intermediate ends are retracted.
3. A disposable garment as in claim 2, wherein the retracted intermediate ends are free from adhesive.

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4. A disposable garment as in claim 1, wherein the first and second elastics have been cut into a plurality of elastic sections.

5. A disposable garment as in claim 1, wherein the waist opening is surrounded at least in part by a waist elastic.

6. A disposable garment as in claim 5, wherein the waist elastic comprises threads, ribbons, a film, or a composite.

7. A disposable garment as in claim 1, wherein the front body portion and the back body portion include body elastics positioned between the waist opening and the leg openings.

8. A disposable garment as in claim 1, wherein the garment defines a length direction and a width direction transverse to the length direction, wherein the crotch elastics extendably affixed to opposing edges of the crotch portion extend in the length direction of the garment.

9. A disposable garment as in claim 1, wherein the garment defines a length direction and a width direction transverse to the length direction, wherein the crotch portion is free from continuous elastics spanning the width direction of the garment.

10. A disposable garment as in claim 1, wherein the opposing crotch elastics and the first and second elastics overlap.

11. A disposable garment as in claim 1, wherein the garment has a body side liner positioned to face the wearer.

12. A disposable garment as in claim 11, wherein the body side liner comprises a front body portion element and a back body portion element which are separate from one another.

13. A disposable garment as in claim 1, wherein the intermediate ends are adjacent the crotch portion.

14. A disposable garment as in claim 1, wherein the intermediate ends extend over the crotch portion.

15. A disposable garment as in claim 1, wherein at least one of the first or second elastic is angled with respect to a longitudinal centerline of the disposable garment.

16. A disposable garment comprising:
 - a front body portion, a back body portion, and a crotch portion in between the front body portion and the back body portion, the front body portion and the back body portion being connected together to form a waist opening, a first leg opening, and second leg opening, the first leg opening being surrounded by a first front leg edge portion, a first back leg edge portion, and a first crotch leg edge portion positioned in between the first front leg edge portion and the first back leg edge portion, the second leg opening being surrounded by a second front leg edge portion, a second back leg edge portion, and second crotch leg edge portion positioned in between the second front leg edge portion and the second back leg edge portion;
 - an absorbent located at least within the crotch portion;
 - a first elastic having a first end near a first edge of the front body portion and extending along the first front leg edge portion and the second front leg edge portion to a second end near a second edge of the front body portion, the first elastic having been cut to form a first front intermediate end spaced from a second front intermediate end;
 - a second elastic having a first end near a first edge of the back body portion and extending along the first back leg edge portion and along the second back leg edge portion to a second end near a second edge of the back body portion, the second elastic having been cut to form a first back intermediate end spaced from a second back intermediate end;
 - a plurality of opposing crotch elastics extendably affixed to opposing edges of the crotch portion in between the first elastic and the second elastic on each side of the crotch portion;

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a body side liner positioned to face the wearer, wherein the
body side liner comprises a front body portion element
and a back body portion element which are separate
from one another; and
wherein the crotch portion defines a width and is free from 5
continuous elastics spanning the width.

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